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ABSTRACT

The aims of the study summarized in this document were to develop a viable classroom instruction program of reading and writing for elementary school children of standards (grades) 1 and 2 who faced difficulties in learning to read and write. Specific steps included: (1) developing a quick and easily administered screening device to identify children with learning difficulties; (2) identifying children in standards 2 and 3 of an Indian school with environmentally determined learning difficulties and those with true learning disabilities; (3) developing a graded classroom program for both groups of children; (4) implementing a 3 month program for children with learning difficulties; and (5) evaluating this program in terms of gains in children's performance and the feasibility of implementation. The screening device which was developed (Teachers Rating Scale) identified all 88 children in both standards as having learning difficulties. It permitted the division of these children into two groups according to the relative degree of their problems. The one child identified as learning disabled was tested further and an individual program was designed to make up for his deficiencies. Comparison of pre- and post-testing results indicated that the experimental group that received the remedial instruction improved significantly in reading. Among other recommedations, it is suggested that the reading program and Gujarati screening and testing tools be modified and standardized for wider usage. (CB)

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION, 1983

A CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION PROGRAM FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES : SUMMARY

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Summary Ph.D. BEST COPY

A CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION PROGRAM FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES : SUMMARY

The study was undertaken as an attempt to develop a viable classroom instruction program of reading and writing for elementary school children of standards II and III who faced difficulties in learning to read and write. The main objectives of the study were:

1. To develop an easy to administer, quick screening device to identify children who face difficulties in reading and writing.
2. To identify children with: (a) learning difficulties, and (b) learning disabilities from standards II and III of the Sayajigunj Mishra Shala No.5.
3. To develop a graded class-room program for (a) children with difficulties in learning to read and write, and (b) children with learning disabilities.
4. To implement a program for children with learning difficulties.
5. To evaluate the program in terms of: (a) gains in childrens performance, and (b) feasibility for classroom implementation.

Various compensatory programs are designed all over the world to help the disadvantaged. The outcome of these programs reiterate the fact that the scholastic problems faced by the disadvantaged children are sociogenic in nature. Parallel to the disadvantaged section, there is another group of children who face academic failure who are called "the learning disabled".

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Though these children exhibit similar kinds of difficulties in learning-especially in reading and writing these are not due to environmental correlates but exist within the child.

The field of learning disability is in its infancy and is characterised by a state of flux. There are ambiguities beginning with definition of a learning disabled child, spreading into the assessment, identification and remediation processes. The exact prevalence of such children is yet not estimated in our country.

For both groups of children reading and writing are the main areas of difficulty. Since these are the basic tools of learning all the content areas of primary school curriculum, the value and importance of reading and writing can not be over-emphasized. There are various programs and approaches available to help children overcome their difficulties in reading and writing. In our conditions of limited resources we have to look for an approach and model which is as viable as it is effective. This forms the rationale for the present study.

METHOD

Research design: The research design adopted for the present study was 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design. There are two standards, II and III, two groups, experimental and control with two levels of difficulty, high and low.

Sample: Sample A consisted of 88 children equally divided in standards II and III, facing difficulties in learning to read and write. The sample was selected on the basis of Draw-a-Man test of IQ, Graded Word Test (Written) and Teacher's

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Rating Scale.

Sample B emerged from Sample A. It consisted of one child with learning disabilities.

Tools and Tests

Part I : Tools/Tests used for the selection of Sample A.

1. Draw-a-Man Test of IQ for Indian children (DAM) (Phatak, 1966). It was administered mainly to acertain the normalcy of the IQ of children.
2. Graded Word Test - Written (GWT-written): It was prepared by the investigator on similar lines as Schonell's Graded Word List with the main purpose of understanding the spelling skills of children.
3. Teacher's Rating Scale (TRS): TRS was developed to fulfil one of the objectives of the study namely "to develop an effective and easy to administer screening device to identify children with learning difficulties."

Part II : Tools/Tests used as pre-test and post-test measures.

4. Pre-requisite Reading Test (PRT): Pre-requisite Reading Test was prepared with the purpose of testing children's knowledge of Gujarati letters and "barakhadi".
5. Reading Analysis Test (RAT): Reading Analysis Test was prepared on similar lines as Durell's Reading Analysis with the purpose of assessing children's performance in various components of reading. Listening comprehension, Word recognition and analysis, Hearing sounds in words, Oral reading and Silent reading are its main components.

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6. Graded Word Test - Oral (GWT-Oral): It is the same as GWT-Written. The only difference being that GWT-Oral is a reading test.

7. Interview schedule: Interview schedule was prepared to find out from the teachers, views about the various aspects of the program to determine its classroom usage.

Part III : Tools/Test used to identify children with Learning Disabilities

8. Gujarati Adaptation of Weschler's Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC): Out of 12, four components of WISC, two verbal and two non-verbal were administered as part of the battery.

9. Children's Embedded Figure Test (CEFT): CEFT developed by Witkin, Oltman, Raskin and Karp (1971), measures the figure-ground perception of a child and reflects extent of competence at perceptual disembedding. Local norms have been established for CEFT.

10. Matching Familiar Figure Test (MFFT): Developed by Kagan (1965), MFFT is designed to identify children who are reflective or impulsive in their cognitive style of tempo.

Pre-testing: Prior to the program childrens responses was categorised on TRS. Accordingly all the children fell in category II i.e. "Children facing difficulties in learning". Within this main category the children were distributed into two sub-categories i.e. children facing high difficulties in learning and children facing low difficulties in learning.

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Children were pre-tested on three test measures namely Pre-requisite Reading Test, Graded Word Test (Oral) and Reading Analysis Test.

Program Description: One week after the completion of the pre-testing, a graded program of reading and writing was implemented for the children of standards II and III. The duration of the program was of three months.

The broad objective of the program was to enable the children to overcome their learning difficulties, especially difficulties in reading and writing while simultaneously helping them cover their prescribed syllabus.

The strategy adopted for the program was group strategy. The main content of the program included letters of Gujarati alphabet, barakhadi, simple and complex words of the prescribed Readers, simple and complex lessons in the Readers.

Post-testing: At the end of the 12 weeks, after a gap of one week, children were post-tested on the same test measures that were used for pre-testing.

Analysis: Analysis of covariance was employed for each test measure separately to find out the significance of difference between the groups, levels of difficulty and standards.

Results were tabulated and scrutinized to identify children who might be suffering from "learning disabilities" on the following basis:

1. All those children of the experimental group who showed minimum to no gains in atleast two test measures.

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2. All those children who showed atleast four traits of a child with learning disability on TRS as rated by the class teacher.
3. All those children who exhibited errors typical of a learning disabled child on GWT (Written).
4. All those children who exhibited a cluster of atleast four characteristics typical of a learning disabled child.

Any child falling in all the above mentioned categories was assessed further on a battery of tests described in part III of the section of "Tools".

Results

The major results of the study can be summarised thus:

1. A Teacher's Rating Scale developed to meet the need of a quick and easy-to-administer screening device to identify children with learning difficulties appears useful.
2. The performance of children from pre- to post-tests revealed that: (a) there were no interactional effects among the variables; (b) there was a significant effect of treatment alone;
3. Specific dimensions of the results reveal that: (a) children of the experimental as well as the control group in both, II and III standards were performing at very low level prior to the program, on all the test measures; (b) while the performance of the control group remained more or less the same in the post-test, the children of the experimental group improved significantly in all the test measures.

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4. Qualitative analysis of childrens performance revealed that the children of the experimental group exhibited improvement in: (a) recognition and meaningful understanding of letters, 'barakhadi' and simple words; (b) letter formation; (c) Ability to read letters, 'barakhadi', words and simple sentences; (d) conscious efforts at reading and writing.
5. The program developed, executed and evaluated through the study proved effective in terms of: (a) childrens' gains; (b) feasibility for classroom implementation.
6. Out of 88 children, only one child from standard II was identified as having a "learning disability". Based on the analysis of his performance on the test battery the areas of his deficits were delineated. The program prescription was developed aiming at remedying his deficits.

Conclusion

On the basis of the results presented in the three sections the following conclusions can be drawn.

1. The Teacher's Rating Scale developed to identify children with learning difficulties proved useful as a quick and effective screening device. Since it proved valid as well as reliable, it can be recommended for the use of the primary school teachers.
2. The program proved effective and promises to be feasible in terms of actual classroom implementation.

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Recommendations for Further Study

The following recommendations are suggested as a result of this study:

1. The program developed through the present study should be tried out in various Municipal Schools of Baroda. This would not only provide conclusive evidence of its efficacy but would also enable further modifications and improvement to make the program more viable.
2. Similar program can be developed in the area of Arithmetic.
3. The tools prepared and developed as part of the present study can be field tested, modified, improved upon and standardised for the use of Gujarati medium schools. Since there is a paucity of tools in Gujarati, this would be a very useful and valuable contribution.
4. A Teacher's In-service program can be developed and planned to make teachers aware of the concept of learning disabilities so that she/he can identify such a child in her class.